



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1301.2 - Victorian Year Book (Soft cover), 1998

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 05/03/1998

### Special Article - Multimedia Developments in Victorian Communications

Article reproduced from Victorian Year Book, 1998 (ABS Catalogue No. 1301.2)

#### Promoting the growth of the information industries through investment

The Victorian economy has benefited from the dynamic growth of the global information industries and from the new opportunities of the information age. Recent new investments have been made across the spectrum of the information industries, reflecting both their changing industry structures and globalisation. For example:

- data processing services - IBM has set up an Asia Pacific data processing venture in Ballarat to service 23 Asian counties;
- help desk facilities - Oracle has established a 340 person Asia Pacific support centre to provide help desk facilities for 27 countries in the region;
- mirror sites - DEC has established its Asia Pacific - Alta Vista Mirror" site in Melbourne in a joint venture with a local company and Netscape has established in Melbourne the first Netscape mirror site outside the US along with its Australasian Head Office;
- mobile telephony - Ericsson has established its Asia Pacific mobile telephone repair facility for the region in Melbourne;
- Java programming language - Sun Microsystems has established a Java Centre of Excellence in Melbourne, with its Asia Pacific site to be located at the Interactive Information Institute at RMIT;
- interactive kiosk applications - Olivetti has established its multimedia development centre for interactive kiosk applications in Melbourne.

In value, total investments of \$1.2 billion have been made between 1995-97 creating 6,900 new jobs<sup>1</sup>.

#### Promoting the development of a multimedia skilled community

While Australian Internet take up rates are relatively high, the development of the information society will depend on widespread community business and acceptance. A number of State Government-led initiatives are assisting the development of community access to and awareness of the potential offered by multimedia communications - as a means of publishing locally-based information and forming communities of interest.

VICNET ([www.vicnet.net.au](http://www.vicnet.net.au)) - a project of the State Library of Victoria - is an electronic networking infrastructure established on the state's base of public libraries. It maintains a World Web Site that generates over a million "hits" a week, provides affordable access to networked information, and a focus point for government and community groups to publish their own information on the Internet.

Complementing VICNET are a number of programs to build community skills and familiarity with networked information. Each year 6,000 teachers receive training in new information and communications technologies. Skills.net ([www.skills.net.au/](http://www.skills.net.au/)) provides funding to local community proposals that provide skills development and fulfil community needs. This will provide Internet skills to more than 40,000 Victorians over the next three years. Webspinners - ([www.webspinners.net.au](http://www.webspinners.net.au)) - is a structured training and work experience program for young people aged 16-19 years that provides participants with the basic skills required for entry level employment in the multimedia industry.

## **Fostering the development of a vibrant communications industry**

The evolving information industries are typically collaborative in nature. For example, multimedia content and applications are produced by firms that bring together the skills of many diverse industries; and new technologies are often the product of research and development performed by firms and academic institutions in strategic alliances.

A number of collaborative institutions for the information institutions have been established in Victoria. Amongst these are EMERGE - ([www.EMERGE.com.au](http://www.EMERGE.com.au)) - one of the six cooperative multimedia centres established by the Commonwealth Government. EMERGE brings together the multimedia expertise of four universities and four private companies, and acts as a catalyst for training, research and development, industry intelligence and networking. Melbourne IT promotes the commercialisation of Melbourne University's IT&T and multimedia research and expertise, in partnership with Ericsson and Ilog. The Interactive Information Institute at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology is a centre for the development of creative and broad ranging ICT applications also conducted in partnership with industry to assist commercialisation. The Greenhills Enterprise Centre in Ballarat conducts 'investment ready' programs and an incubator program to support growing information industry firms.

## **Extending Victoria's role as a creative centre for the development of multimedia content**

Multimedia is changing the production processes and nature of the visual arts enabling the transformation of the states' film and television industries. For example, the use of computers spans virtually every phase of film production including script writing, budget planning, set design and pre visualisation of live action set up, and post production. Telecommunications developments have enabled relatively high resolution images to be transmitted between two locations including international destinations demonstrating the possibilities and increased opportunities for Australian post production houses.

Cinemia is one of the five core cultural institutions of the State of Victoria and is charged with significant community service obligations embracing these new opportunities. Cinemia aims to provide the people of Victoria with appropriate access to the art form of the moving image and to achieve this end works to support, develop and promote the film and multimedia industries in Victoria. Cinemia administers the Multimedia 21 Fund which provides funding for the development of commercial and educational applications by the Victorian multimedia industry ranging from software to assist air traffic controller training to projects for on-line tourism and travel businesses incorporating on-line transaction capabilities. Cinemia has also undertaken a Digital Media Library trial, digitising content which can be delivered on demand over a broadband network.

## **Promoting industry use of electronic commerce**

Currently estimated to be valued at around US\$3 billion per year, electronic commerce is still in early stages of development. However, estimates of its future size and importance are staggering - estimates of the potential global value of Internet transactions by 2000 lie in the range of US\$100 billion to US\$150 billion per year<sup>2</sup>. Developing business awareness of the opportunities for re-engineering companies and reaching wider consumer markets will be a key factor determining whether this growth is achieved.

Established with State, Federal and private sector funding the Australian Electronic Business Network (AEBN) is headquartered in Melbourne. The AEBN is a national electronic commerce resource facility aimed at accelerating the uptake of electronic commerce by small to medium-sized businesses through demonstrating business benefits.

A number of industry-based initiatives are also underway in Victoria, specifically in the pharmaceutical, clothing and textile and agriculture sectors which have been the focus of trials to demonstrate potential efficiencies and opportunities of electronic networking and transactions.

## **Improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of government through the use of multimedia and communications applications**

Governments are significant users of ICTs. The development and deployment of ICTs has therefore presented Government with significant opportunities to improve the way it communicates both with itself and with the public.

Currently Victorian Government networks simply link a government site with a central computer site in a departments headquarters. To take advantage of opportunities presented by ICT developments the Victorian Government has contracted with AAPT Networks to build, own and operate a wide area network that establishes a single data network connecting Victorian Government sites - more than 3100 in all. The network - VicOne ([www.net.aapt.com.au/vicone](http://www.net.aapt.com.au/vicone)) - is the first high capacity network of its kind in Australia. VicOne's advanced data network will offer a standard operating environment across government, and its broadband capability will enable a rapid exchange of data, seamless interaction between computer systems, and the opportunity to use the latest technology tools such as video conferencing and telemedicine links. All Victorian Government schools are scheduled to be connected to VicOne by June 1998 - allowing efficient sharing of specialist teaching, administration and the linking of schools, Universities and TAFEs.

## **Government goes on-line**

The Victorian Government has begun the process of making all of its information and services available through on-line channels by the year 2001.

The Government has initiated extensive web sites ([www.vic.gov.au](http://www.vic.gov.au)) and has dramatically improved public access to legislative information ([www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/vicgov/parlhans.html](http://www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/vicgov/parlhans.html)), making democratic processes accessible in a way that has never before been possible.

In a world first<sup>3</sup>, the Victorian Government in partnership with the private sector has developed an integrated electronic service delivery infrastructure - known as maxi ([www.maxi.com.au](http://www.maxi.com.au) and by phone 132723), which was launched in late 1997. Currently it provides access to a range of organisations across the state, such as Yarra Valley Water, Eastern Energy, local councils, Vic Roads and the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. When fully developed maxi will give Victorian citizens and businesses access to many government services at Commonwealth, State

and local levels, and business services, including utilities, through a single access point.

Maxi is a world first for a number of reasons: it is the first multimedia system that:

- allows the same content to be delivered over three different channels - kiosks, the Internet and interactive voice response telephony;
- is designed around the concept of "life events" - consumers only require to know the service they want to access, not the particular government agency;
- addresses the issue of digital signatures and is designed to accept a smart card or disc to input a personal signature on a document;
- combines government with business services.

## **The future**

The information society will have the ability to access immense quantities of information and entertainment on demand, to interact with and manipulate large quantities of data, to transact remotely and to communicate while on the move. It is a vision of ubiquitous communications infrastructure, greater productive efficiencies and service delivery, enhanced personal choice and new possibilities for the way communities of interest relate to each other.

The emerging information economy is truly global; time and distance are less important barriers to communication - and it is all-embracing; all sectors and activities of society, polity and the economy will feel its affects.

For Australia, a distant, sparsely populated country, there are dramatic improvements in the opportunities for engagement with the rest of the world and for intra-regional communication. Social interaction, community development, and opportunities for political participation will undergo significant change.

Around the world Government has been identified as a key player in the development of the information society - as leaders and exemplars, and as owners and providers of infrastructure, services and content. Multimedia Victoria's aim is to lead Victoria's transition to an information economy - to promote the development of Victoria's information industries and support the use of new information and communication technologies by citizens, government and business.

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